

## EDITORIAL.

## God's Plan of Salvation.

Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God. 2. Kings 5: 14.

In the previous verses two very different personages are brought to our notice. Naaman, who was a great man, captain of the host of the king of Syria, and a little maid, a captive from the land of Israel. Happiness does not depend upon the station in life in which a man finds himself, for Naaman, with all his greatness, and living as he was in affluence, was visited by leprosy, and experienced sorrow; whilst the little maid adorned her humble sphere, and was happy in her work. The different classes of men are equalized by circumstances to a greater degree than we often think. "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown;" and riches are often, as they were designated by the ancients, "impediments;" whilst many in the humble ranks of life, like Longfellow's "Village Blacksmith," go through the world happily, enjoying the honest labor of the day and the earned repose of the night. Where there is true worth it will triumph over the greatest obstacles.

No religious person ought willingly to enter an irreligious household, or hold intimate and incongenial intercourse with godless families; but when in the natural course of duty one finds himself in such a place, it is well to make the best of such unfavorable circumstances, and turn disadvantages to advantages. This little maid did not make much show of her religion, but she possessed that wisdom which is from above, and was enabled to speak a word in season to a weary soul. Through her influence Naaman with his train of servants waited on Elisha, and entreated him to cure his leprosy. So he was commanded to wash himself seven times in the river Jordan, and by obeying he was cleansed. We propose to take the narrative as illustrative of the great truth—*The necessity of conforming with God's plan to secure salvation.*

1. *That God's plan is contrary to the expectations of man.* So it was here. Naaman had been thinking within himself how the prophet would act. "Behold, I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." Instead of all this he merely sent a messenger commanding him to wash himself in the Jordan. How simple, and so he thought how foolish! The very simplicity bewildered him and kindled his wrath. But if his own plan would have been sufficient he might have cured himself without going to the prophet at all. So the salvation which is in Christ Jesus has always been a stumbling-block to men on account of its simplicity, and many have clogged the simple gospel with innumerable ceremonies of man's devising, painting the pure lily, and bringing their own faint rushlight to increase the splendor of the noonday sun. Men would cross the ocean and wander in far off lands in search of wisdom, they would survey the heavens, and descend to the lowermost parts of the earth, but God's word of life is nigh unto us, in our mouth and in our heart. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned."

This simple remedy for the cleansing of the soul is a stumbling-block to the foolish, conceited and self-willed. Let us ask ourselves the question, why do we not accept the Lord's simple plan, and let us honestly answer.

2. *God's plan tends to humble the pride of man.* Naaman thought there was some royal cure for a royal patient, and an honorable way to deal with such an honorable man. How indignant he felt when the prophet only sent a messenger to him, and the remedy prescribed being so humiliating too. He could not understand going to wash himself in the river Jordan, the river of despised Israel, whilst if it were necessary to apply the waters of any river, could he not have washed himself in the proverbial crystal streams of Damascus? "So he turned and went away in a rage." So God's plan of salvation is mortifying to the pride of the sinful heart. The Pharisees were offended at the Savior for making no distinction between them and the sinners. They were entangled in the snares of the pride of life. Their plan was to glorify self and humble others;

but to enter the kingdom of Jesus Christ the first step required is for a man to deny himself.

Faith consists in leaving our own frail vessel and taking our passage on board the ark of God, to deem ourselves nothing and God all in all. We find Peter, having received the consent of the Master, walking on the sea; but the moment he began to trust himself, and feel safe in the power of his own strength, the boisterous winds and the treacherous waves frightened him, and conscious of his weakness, he with gladness entered the ship and was "safe in the arms of Jesus." The gate is strait, and the road is narrow, but he who is humble and obedient is led at last to safety and bliss. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth—glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth." (Jer. 9:23, 24).

*He who truly feels his need will accept God's plan.*

Though Naaman was at first most seriously disappointed, and turned away in a rage, yet on the counsel of his servants, strengthened by his own need and his inward conviction, he complied with the directions given by the prophet. A sense of need is a propelling power that will work wonders, and in conjunction with faith will send the mountain to the sea, and chain the lion that is on the way. This feeling impelled that poor woman to force her way through the crowd and touch the hem of the Savior's garment. Urged by the same motive the blind man willingly went to the pool of Siloam. When the sinner really feels sin a burden, and believes that the meek and lowly Jesus is powerful to remove it, he will not quarrel with the method of salvation; but will come at once, and in humble, childlike obedience accept the Lord's plan. When a man is bent upon becoming rich, or learned, or great in the estimation of the world, he is willing to comply with the world's terms, be they ever so hard. Is it wonderful, then, according to this same principle, that the sinner closes in with the overtures of the Gospel, and accepts the salvation which is in Christ?

4. *Conformity to God's plan will secure a man's salvation.* Naaman obeyed, and he was accordingly cured. "His flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

*Some means are generally used.* The miracles of the Old and New Testaments are similar in this, that means were used in bringing about such wonderful deeds. It would have been all the same to God to cure Naaman with a word, but Naaman himself would have lost the valuable lessons he received, and the necessary training he went through.

*The means were not sufficient in themselves* apart from the blessing of God to cure his leprosy, but as it was God's plan it effected its purpose. The ark was rendered safe from the waters of the deluge, as it was constructed according to the direction given by God. The waters of Marah lost their bitterness by a tree being thrown into them, because that was the means appointed by the Lord. To encompass the walls of Jericho with rams' horns might have seemed very foolish and useless to some, but was of divine appointment and so it succeeded. Men are thus taught to do their duty, and then to wait for the Divine blessing. Naaman could wash himself in the Jordan, though he could not cure himself. We are to come to the Savior to be healed, and so that we may reasonably expect the blessing, let us do as he tells us.

*His cure was complete.* His flesh was made like the flesh of a little child. He possessed a thoroughly renovated body. No taint of the malady to cast its dark shadow over the future. So he who accepts God's plan is wholly renewed, created anew in Christ Jesus. True, he retains the marks of the leprosy of sin whilst in the world. As Mr. Joseph Cook remarks, although the particles of the body have been changed many times, still the scars made when the fingers were too young to be trusted with edged tools continue through the years, and are absolutely unchangeable in the changing flesh. So the scars of sin continue after years of reformation, but, thanks be to God, day by day the nature becomes less and less under the influence

of sin, and at last the ransomed soul will take its flight to the realms of purity and bliss.

## Exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount.

The great central thought in the opening sentences of the sermon on the mount is the exaltation of the humble and the humiliation of the proud. It is a striking characteristic of the history of Christ that the first sermon he preached to men, which the Holy Spirit caused to be preserved, and one of the ordinances that he instituted in his last evening on earth, are both directed against the enemy of humility.

Blessed are the poor in spirit; for their's is the kingdom of heaven—the first one of the great truths which Christ taught. The translation of the original does not present the whole force of the language in the original. "Because of them," or for their sakes in the kingdom of heaven, would more truly represent the original. Thus in plain words, the kingdom of heaven has been set up for them or on their accounts.

Poor in spirit. This does not mean that they are barren of the Holy Spirit, but that the heart is humble, submissive and unpretending. The Laodicean Christian is a good example of the opposite character. He is in need of nothing. He is satisfied with his situation. He is rich and in need of nothing. He is proud of himself and requires no more help from God. He is neither cold nor hot, but exactly right, and he is pleased with himself.

But the poor in spirit are those who feel their utter dependence upon God. His spirit dwells in them richly, but still they feel there is great lack for more. They really feel poor in this divine substance, and seek to possess more.

When the words return that have gone out from the "Mount of Beatitudes," with their immense following, many will be surprised. The poor, unnoticed, uncultured and unhonored who have lived in Christ and walked in his teachings, will stand in front and receive the crown of rejoicing at the final time of reckoning, while the proud, the cultured, and the would-be possessors of the throne of God will be cast off. "Many shall say to me in that day, 'Have we not taught in thy name?' This means a class of religious professors, of course. Christ will reject them. They shall suppose that they are all right; they made their own gospel and they obeyed it. What was not convenient in Christ's gospel they rejected; or changed and this is what they expect shall save them. But at that day it will be shown them that the kingdom of heaven was not prepared for them; that only those who were willing to bow in obedience to Christ's commandments and submissive to the divine will can enter it. Whoever will humble himself as a little child, be willing to associate with any of God's human beings to do them good and to lead them from error and sin, shall be worthy.

Humbleness of heart and mind should never be forgotten. The daily prayers should remember it: the pulpit should encourage it, and its importance should imbue the whole soul. It is acknowledged as of primary importance in the Lord's prayer, in the words, "Thy will be done." There are many who are too high-minded to bow in obedience to this petition of the model prayer. Whoever is submissive to the will of the Father is poor in spirit, and to him belongs the kingdom of heaven: he is one of the saints who shall take the kingdom and possess it.

He that hath no bridle on his tongue hath no grace in his heart.—*St. Jerome.*

They who God's face can understand,  
Feel not the workers of His hand.

—*Lord Houghton.*

A sound discretion is not so much indicated by never making a mistake as by never repeating it.—*Bovee.*

When two truths seem directly opposed to each other, we must not question either, but remember there is a third—God—who reserves to Himself the right to harmonize them.—*Madame Swetchine.*

Men say their principles point to heaven. Why, so does every tree that buds, and every bird that rises as it sings. Men say their aisles are good for worship. Why, so is every mountain glen and rough seashore.—*Ruskin.*